

Post Office Inspectors  
and Their Hunt  
for the 1930s

# Tri-State Gang



**By Postal  
Inspector  
Ron J. Pry,**

**North Houston Domicile,  
Houston Division**

During the gangster heyday of the 1920s and 1930s, Post Office Inspectors met their fair share of gun-toting sociopaths who targeted the U.S. Mail, especially gold and currency shipments sent by the Federal Reserve

Banks to various financial institu-

tions. The man pictured in this original 1934 Wanted Poster would certainly place at the top of any list of the most dangerous postal offenders ever sought by the U.S.

Postal Inspection Service.

Walter Legenza, who stood five-feet, four-inches tall, proved to be an elusive, violent, cold-blooded murderer who was also a mail robber and a jail escapee. His cohort, Robert Mais, was equally

ruthless. The two men, shown in old police mug shots (see next page), were leaders of the Tri-State Gang that operated from Richmond, Virginia, to New York City.

The gang's exploits have been the focus of numerous magazine and newspaper stories, as well as a 1950 movie, *Highway 301*, a reference to the gang's favored escape route. Even Batman battled the Tri-State Gang in a 1930s-era comic book. Then in December 1959, a brand-new, hit TV series, *The Untouchables*, featured an episode appropriately titled "The Tri-State Gang," starring William Bendix as Walter Legenza.

Legenza and Mais first came to the attention of Post Office Inspectors on March 8, 1934. In broad daylight in downtown Richmond, Legenza and Mais held up a mail truck thought to be carrying bags of currency from a local Federal Reserve Bank. Legenza forced open the back door of the truck and shot the truck driver to death. Another employee, hiding on the floor board, escaped death only because Legenza didn't see him. Legenza and Mais then grabbed assorted mail sacks and sped away. It was later they discovered the sacks contained only canceled checks and bank papers, and that the killing had been pointless.

A few weeks later the girlfriend of Mais, Leonora Fontaine, identified Legenza and Mais as responsible for the robbery and killing, but she had great difficulty telling her story. Barely clinging to life, she was recovering from gunshot wounds that punctured a lung and barely missed her heart. The injuries came from bullets fired by Legenza and Mais, who also shot Legenza's girlfriend at the same time in a botched effort to silence the women from telling what they knew. Only Leonora Fontaine survived,

although she was far from safe. While Leonora was recovering at Delaware County Hospital in Philadelphia, Legenza hired an assassin, "Big George" Phillips, who then failed twice in his efforts to end Leonora's life. The failures resulted in the termination of Big George—literally, by way of several .38 caliber bullets fired by Mais.

Undeterred and desperate to silence Ms. Fontaine, Legenza and Mais attempted to bomb the hospital, but were foiled in that effort, too. Finally, "the woman who knew too much" was moved under heavy guard to Washington, DC, where she recovered from her wounds. Leonora then freely answered all questions posed by Post Office Inspectors and other lawmen.

Realizing Leonora was now in the hands of the feds, Legenza and Mais fled to Baltimore and found a new hideout, a rented house in a quiet neighborhood. But suspicious neighbors soon noticed the

two occupants were never seen during daylight. Only after nightfall was there any activity, with men coming and going at all hours. Unknown to the neighbors, the Tri-State Gang was recruiting new members and planning new heists.

After neighbors tipped off local police, an astute detective recognized Mais from a mug shot that described him as "a ratty little killer with a high pitched squeaky voice" who had "Mother" tattooed on his arm. Once Mais and Legenza were identified, a squad of police attempted to arrest the duo as they left the house in a vehicle. Mais saw the lawmen and opened fire with a revolver. Answering fire from police machine guns dropped Mais with six bullet wounds to the stomach. Legenza attempted to speed away, but his vehicle was riddled with bullets, causing him to crash into oncoming police cars. Legenza fled back to the house uninjured, but volleys of machine gun fire convinced him to surrender. For a quiet

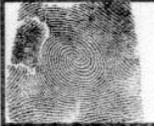
Form 503—Ed. 5-34

**Post Office Department**  
POST OFFICE INSPECTOR IN CHARGE  
WASHINGTON, D. C.

FINGERPRINT CLASSIFICATION  
16 U 10 10  
20 - MI M  
Cases 64241-D—85785-D  
Richmond, Va.  
December 10, 1934

## WANTED!

WALTER LEGENZA, aliases WILLIAM DAVIS, POLOCK JOE  
**Mail Robber and Escaped Murderer**

**DESCRIPTION**

Age, 41 years  
Height, 5 feet 4½ inches  
Weight, 130 pounds  
Hair, light brown  
Eyes, blue  
Complexion, dark  
Tattoo, floral bouquet, forearm, front right  
Build, small



This man was convicted and sentenced to be electrocuted for the murder of a custodian of the mails at Richmond, Va., March 8, 1934.

On September 29, 1934, he escaped from the City Jail, Richmond, Va., (accompanied by Robert Mais), after killing a police officer and wounding two others, and stealing a mail truck to further the escape. The Director of Public Safety, Richmond, Va., will pay \$1,000 for the arrest, or information leading to the arrest, of this man. The Post Office Department has a standing offer of reward, not to exceed \$200, for the arrest and conviction of any person stealing Government property. If this person is located, please telegraph or telephone the undersigned collect, or one of the following persons: Chief of Police, Richmond, Va.; Washington, D. C.; Baltimore, Md.; or nearest Post Office Inspector, State or City Police Station.

**T. M. MILLIGAN,**  
Post Office Inspector in Charge,  
Washington, D. C.

U. S. GOVERNMENT PRINTING OFFICE: 1934

suburban neighborhood, June 4, 1934, would be a day not soon forgotten.

Mais and Legenza weren't just cold-blooded killers, they were also lucky. Legenza wasn't even injured in the gun battle with police, and Mais recovered from his wounds. Both were eventually transported back to Richmond and, in August 1934, convicted in state court of murdering the mail truck driver. Both received the death sentence. The Tri-State Gang should have been history at this point, but their luck held out.

While awaiting his date with the electric chair, Mais's mother smuggled two pistols, concealed in a baked turkey, to the Richmond City Jail's two most notorious inmates. Barely one month after their murder conviction, the pair broke out on a sunny Saturday afternoon in September. A running gun battle ensued in downtown Richmond. With Legenza and Mais firing volleys of gunshots and reloading on the run, they eventually hijacked a post office truck and disappeared, leaving behind one dead police officer and two other officers wounded and bleeding on the pavement.

On the loose again, Legenza and Mais picked up \$50,000 in quick cash by kidnapping a Philadelphia mob boss turned banker. Once they got the money, they murdered the banker. They next hit a military arsenal at Norris-town, Pennsylvania, stealing automatic rifles, pistols and thousands of rounds of ammunition. The gang was now heavily armed. Post Office Inspectors and other lawmen feared for the worst. Then something incredible happened.

The gang that couldn't be stopped by the local police or the feds met their downfall in the form of a nine-year-old schoolgirl. The girl told her friends at school she was afraid to go home because her mother's friends were staying there and they had lots of guns. A schoolmate told her parents the story, and they in

turn spoke to the Philadelphia police. Before long, the police had identified Legenza as one of the occupants. Knowing Legenza and his gang were now heavily armed with machine guns, the police approached the house slowly in an armored truck. It was just past sundown, and the police surveillance team confirmed everyone was still in the house. As

Mais, who also appeared injured.

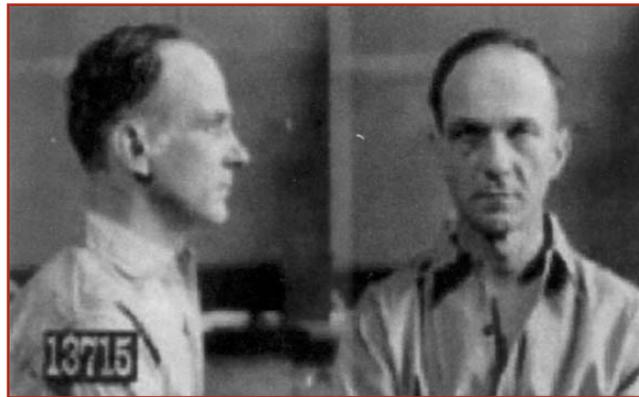
Back at Legenza's hideout, the armored truck had stopped in the yard, and police crashed through the front door. They found two gang members still inside, one of whom was wanted for killing a police officer. They also found two women and nearly all the stolen military arsenal and munitions. But Legenza and Mais were gone, and Post Office Inspectors issued the Wanted Poster (see previous page).

By January 1935, the investigation led to New York City. Rumors in the mob underworld had surfaced that Legenza was in a local hospital after breaking both legs in a fall at a railway station during a shoot-out. A task force of Post Office Inspectors, agents from the Department of Justice, and New York and Philadelphia police officers visited all the hospitals in New York City, personally viewing every patient with leg injuries. On January 18, 1935, the task force found their man at Presbyterian Hospital. Walter Legenza was lying helpless in a hospital bed with casts on both legs. He was arrested without resistance. Robert Mais was found a few hours later hiding in a boarding house under an assumed name.

He too was confined to bed, suffering from machine gun wounds received months earlier in Baltimore.

Legenza and Mais had more than proven their talents at escape and murder. There would be no more delays in returning them to Virginia, or in carrying out their death sentence. Barely two weeks after being captured, Legenza and Mais were executed on February 2, 1935, in Virginia's electric chair. Two of the most violent fugitives ever sought by Post Office Inspectors were permanently removed from society.

The poster and mug shots are from the Ron J. Pry Historical Collection.



Walter Legenza



Robert Mais

the armored vehicle turned onto the street, Legenza and Mais drove off in a car. Again, Lady Luck was their ally.

Detectives sped after the duo while the armored vehicle made its way to the residence. Legenza and Mais were cornered at the nearby Wayne Junction Railway Station. A violent shoot-out followed as passengers dove for cover. Most of the detectives, armed with Thompson submachine guns, couldn't use their weapons in the station without a risk of hitting bystanders, a concern not shared by Legenza or Mais. The fugitives managed to escape again, although Legenza was seen being helped away from the scene by



# The Life and Times of Post Office Inspector John P. Clum

By Postal Inspector Ron J. Pry, North Houston Domicile, Houston Division

This 1898 photo is one of two “side-by-side” photos called stereoviews, and are designed to be placed in a handheld viewer called a stereoscope. Peering into the binocular-looking contraption gives viewers a vivid picture with much more dimension than standard photographs available at the

time. By the end of the 19th century, most modern homes had a stereoscope and an assortment of photos proudly displayed in the parlor for guests and family members to enjoy.

The man in the top photo is John P. Clum, who lived from 1851 through 1932. His life and career as a Post Office Inspector depict the

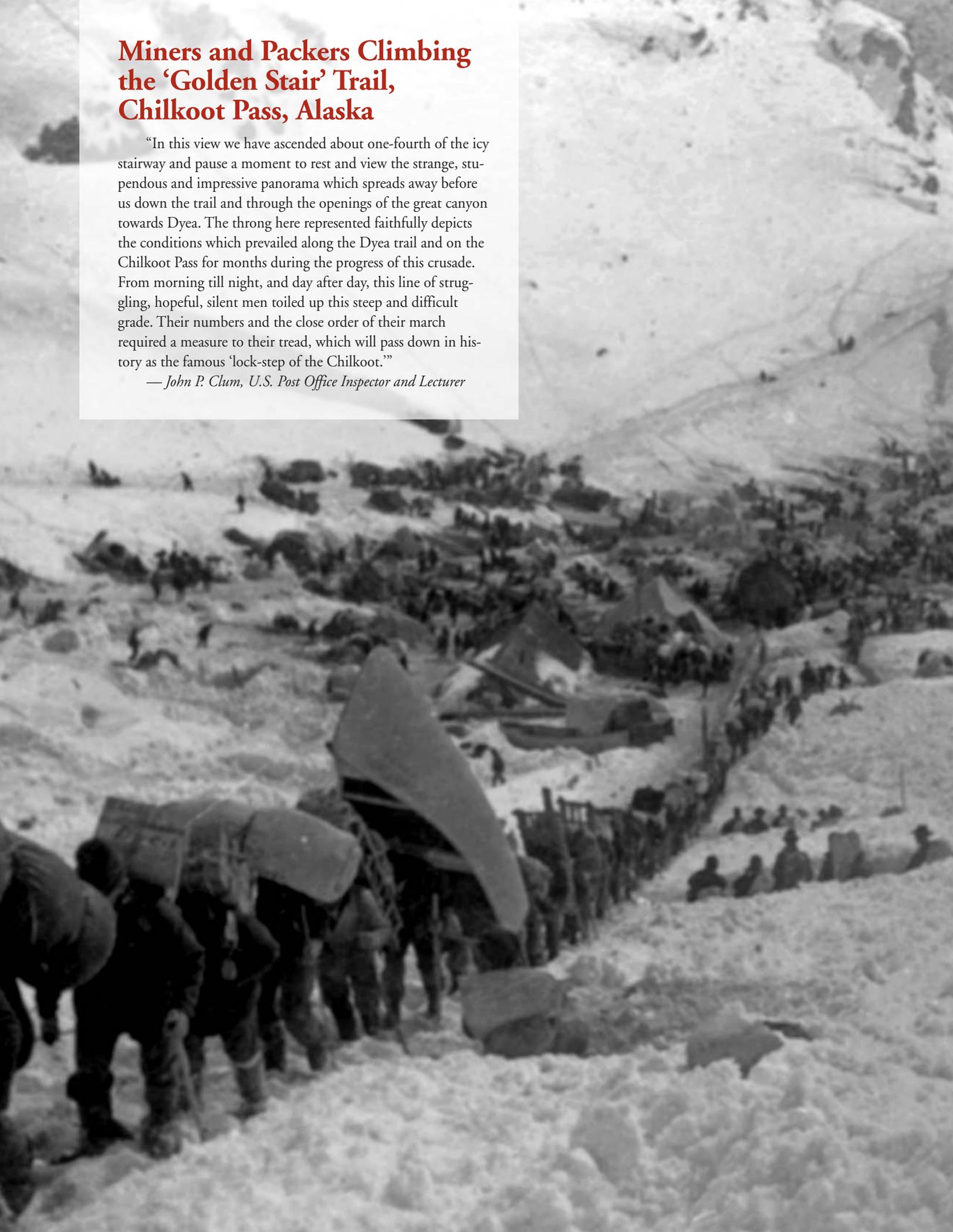
quintessential American frontier life. Clum began his career in public service as a weather observer, but left that position in 1874 for one that offered greater adventure.

John Clum became an Indian agent and scout on the Apache Reservation in San Carlos, Arizona. It was during this time that he captured the

## Miners and Packers Climbing the 'Golden Stair' Trail, Chilkoot Pass, Alaska

"In this view we have ascended about one-fourth of the icy stairway and pause a moment to rest and view the strange, stupendous and impressive panorama which spreads away before us down the trail and through the openings of the great canyon towards Dyea. The throng here represented faithfully depicts the conditions which prevailed along the Dyea trail and on the Chilkoot Pass for months during the progress of this crusade. From morning till night, and day after day, this line of struggling, hopeful, silent men toiled up this steep and difficult grade. Their numbers and the close order of their march required a measure to their tread, which will pass down in history as the famous 'lock-step of the Chilkoot.'"

— *John P. Clum, U.S. Post Office Inspector and Lecturer*



Apache leader Geronimo. Although Geronimo would escape twice—and then surrender after extensive military manhunts—Clum remained the only man who tracked him down and forcefully took him into custody.

By 1880 Clum left the Indian reservation and became the founding editor of the “Tombstone Epitaph.” In his inaugural edition, he coined the phrase “Every Tombstone needs an Epitaph.” He used the newspaper to promote his beliefs concerning law and order on a near-daily basis, and he quickly allied himself with the town’s marshal, Virgil Earp, Virgil’s brothers Wyatt and Morgan, and their associate, John “Doc” Holliday. Clum was the first to report the story of the gunfight at the OK Corral, which occurred on October 26, 1881, only a few dusty blocks from Clum’s office. His defense of the Earps and Holliday was unambiguous, “They did their job and they did it well.”

Clum left Tombstone in 1882 after selling his newspaper and leaving his positions as town mayor and postmaster. He returned briefly in 1885 to serve again as postmaster, but left a year later. Seeking adventure, he rejoined the Post Office Department in 1891 to accept a position as a Post Office Inspector.

In a letter written years later, he described his first domicile, a territory assignment that covered more than 120,000 square miles:

“During 1891 and 1892, I was in Texas for the Post Office Department [as an Inspector]. I had headquarters at Austin and San Antonio and my field was the Western Judicial District of Texas—68 counties extending south to Brownsville and west to El Paso.”

But Clum’s experiences in Tombstone, known throughout the country as a rough, tough, silver mining boomtown, convinced the Postmaster General that Clum’s talents were needed up north in what at that time was called the “Alaska Territory.” Gold had been

discovered in an area called the Klondike.

More than 100,000 would-be millionaires and dreamers made the trek across Canada into the vast, bitter-cold

Alaskan wilderness. Clum was dispatched to establish post offices, appoint postmasters, and determine postal routes. The actual appointment of postmasters had until that time been the sole province of the Postmaster General. Inspector Clum, however, convinced the PMG to delegate that authority to him, arguing convincingly, if not eloquently, that if the usual three-year wait for processing postmaster nominations applied to Alaska “the new postmaster would have been eaten up by bears, died of old age or scurvy, or left the country.”

The stereoview of Clum shown with this article was taken on April 4, 1898, in Sheep Camp, Alaska, on the

Chilkoot Trail. It was the day after Palm Sunday and Clum had been delayed by what became widely known as “The Palm Sunday Avalanche of ’98.” More than 60 fortune seekers, known as “Stampeders,” had been killed and many more injured. Inspector Clum helped search for survivors and recover bodies. His task finished, he then made his way into Sheep Camp and established the town’s first post office. He paused in front of a general store, located in a tent, to pose for this photograph. His description of Chilkoot Pass accompanies the photograph on the opposite page.

Clum remained an Inspector in Alaska until 1906. During his career as

an Inspector, Clum traveled more than 8,000 miles throughout Alaska, appointing postmasters and creating post offices. He traveled by mule, as shown in the stereoview, because mules were far more sure-footed and hardy than horses, a necessity for covering the rugged, icy, and mountainous terrain.

After his career as a Post Office Inspector, Clum was appointed postmaster for Fairbanks, a job he stayed with until his retirement in 1909. John Clum died in 1932, barely three years after serving as pallbearer for his life-long friend, Wyatt Earp. The diamond-studded gold locket he received from the Post Office Department at his retirement is now in the possession of the Smithsonian National Postal Museum. A larger version of the original photograph shown on page 27 is archived at the Library of Congress.

“The Tombstone Epitaph” published an article, which you may find to this day, displayed with a perverse sense of pride, in some Postal Inspection Service offices:

“A typical Post Office Inspector is a man past middle age—spare, wrinkled, intelligent, cold, passive, noncommittal, with eyes like a codfish, polite in contact but, at the time, non-responsive; calm, and as damnably composed as a concrete post or a plaster of Paris case; a petrification with a beard of feldspar and without charm or the friendly germ; minus passion or a sense of humor. Happily, they never reproduce and all of them finally go to hell.”

Although the authenticity of this description could not be verified, like so many other entertaining stories of the American frontier, the embellishment and western flavor of the description far outweighs the issue of whether it is truly fact or folklore.



Thanks to Postal Inspector Tripp C. Brinkley for his contributions to this story (and this photo).



# One Good Intern Deserved an Offer

## Postal Inspector Chris Adams Joined Our Team

Can an unpaid internship be turned into a rewarding career in law enforcement? U.S. Postal Inspector Chris Adams of the New York Division is a good person to ask.

By Postal Inspector  
Lori A. Groen,  
Milwaukee Field Office,  
Chicago Division

Chris attended Marquette University in Milwaukee, Wisconsin, in 1996, and majored in criminal justice. When the university encouraged students to join an intern program, Chris decided to seek one with a law enforcement agency. Specifically, he sought one with the Milwaukee Field Office of the U.S. Postal Inspection Service.



Chris first became interested in the Inspection Service when he was an Explorer at the Forest Park, Ohio, Police Department.

(To learn more about the Explorer program, read "Explorer Post #3972 Gives Young Recruits an Inside Look at Law Enforcement," in this issue of the Bulletin.) At age 15, Chris won a trip to the FBI Academy, but chose also to visit the Postal Inspection Service's Career Development Division in Potomac, Maryland. "I thought about the fact that the U.S. Mail touches everyone's life, nearly every day," said Chris. "I loved the variety of work that Postal Inspectors did and I wanted to learn more about the agency, so I applied to their Internship Program."

The Milwaukee Field Office had never had an intern, but the idea of helping Chris appealed to Assistant Inspector in Charge Rudy Green. "We're happy to assist people who are interested in law enforcement careers," said AIC Green. The Milwaukee Field Office accepted Chris as its first student intern.

Chris was motivated to learn as much as possible during his three days a week

working with Postal Inspectors. He helped with credit card fraud cases, surveillances, and Express Mail label checks. He also conducted research for the U.S. Attorney's Office about the risks to law enforcement officers from blood-borne pathogens.

"I was encouraged by Team Leader Virgil Guralski to pursue my interest in law enforcement in general, and the Postal Inspection Service especially," Chris said. When the internship ended, Guralski's evaluation to Chris' university advisor read, "Chris had a positive attitude and a willingness to work, and he continually sought self-improvement."

After graduating from Marquette University in May 1996, Chris served four years with the U.S. Army—one year in training and three years as a paratrooper. In the spring of 1997, he took the written test for U.S. Postal Inspectors given at Charlotte, North Carolina, although he had two more years to serve in the Army. "I also applied to the DEA and FBI," said Chris, "but the FBI told me I was too young, and I didn't follow through with DEA because I knew I wanted to become a Postal Inspector."

Chris passed the written text and began Basic Training in January 2002, at Potomac, Maryland. "I was very excited to be accepted," he recalled.

Thanks to a positive attitude and a willingness to take on new challenges, Chris is now a Postal Inspector at the New York Division, working fraudulent workers' compensation investigations in Brooklyn. Chris followed his dream, and the Postal Inspection Service is all the richer for it.

# Explorer Post #3972 Gives Young Recruits

## *an Inside Look* at Law Enforcement

**L**aw Enforcement Exploring is a national program aimed at encouraging adolescents interested in pursuing a career in law enforcement. Program sponsors, called Explorer posts, comprise federal, state, and local law enforcement groups that endorse Law Enforcement Exploring by offering resources—including money, time, and staffing—to attract motivated young adults in the community.

Explorer posts try to combine practical instruction with fun, hands-on activities. Key to a successful post is the active participation of leaders from a variety of law enforcement agencies. The New York Division of the U.S. Postal Inspection Service established its Explorer Post #3972 in September 2002. It now has 20 students enrolled in the program.

Led by U.S. Postal Inspector Danita DeVaul and Postal Police Colonel Frank Bonelli, Post #3972 is a dynamic example of what such programs offer. In

the first six months of 2003, Explorers visited Camp Smith near Peekskill, New York, for defensive tactics training. They participated in Law Enforcement Air Day, sponsored by the FBI at the Morristown, New Jersey, Airport and helped produce a Bomb Threat and Search training video. At the Explorer Law Enforcement Winter Competition, Explorers from Post #3972 won first place. Inspector DeVaul and Colonel Bonelli also took Explorers on two all-night outings that included day visits to view security operations at the Postal Service's Morgan Processing and Distribution Center in Manhattan, and at the U.S. Customs offices at JFK Airport. In May 2003, Post #3972 entered the

Explorer Law Enforcement Spring Competition in Staten Island and took third place in the White Collar Crime event.

July 2003 offered an intensive month of activities for the Explorers, who took a field trip to Washington, D.C. The four-day, three-night visit began with a tour of the White House and continued to the U.S. Senate to watch legislators in action

at the Capitol. At the Federal Law Enforcement Officers Memorial, Explorers located the names of fallen Postal Inspectors and Postal Police Officers. The enthusiastic crew toured the Bureau of Engraving and Printing and then headed to Dulles, Virginia, for a behind-the-scenes look at the Postal Inspection Service's National



Forensic Laboratory to learn about the invaluable work of forensic analysts. On their last morning, the Explorers ascended to the top of the Washington Monument and then walked down its 896 steps for the guided tour.

According to Inspector DeVaul, Post #3972 members had bonded as a unit by the end of the trip. "They all worked together to complete chores and took turns cooking, cleaning, and packing," she said. "That's important, because learning to work as part of a team is essential to being a good investigator. It was a rewarding experience for all of us, and I'm proud to have been a part of it," reflected DeVaul, who was assisted on the D.C. trip by Postal Police Lieutenant Linda Esposito and a male chaperone.

Explorers from Post #3972 are now looking forward to a trip to Atlanta planned for July 2004 to attend the National Law Enforcement Explorers' Conference. There they expect to compete with Explorers from across the country and apply lessons they've learned from their mentors at the U.S. Postal Inspection Service.



**Middle rear:** Darius Gonzalez. **Second row (left to right):** Kenneth Fields, Vivian Xie, Johnathan Earle, James Wong. **Front row:** Jessica Huang, Jasmine McCullough, Valerie Matos, Jennifer Wong



**Explorer Jennifer Wong at the Federal Law Enforcement Officers Memorial**



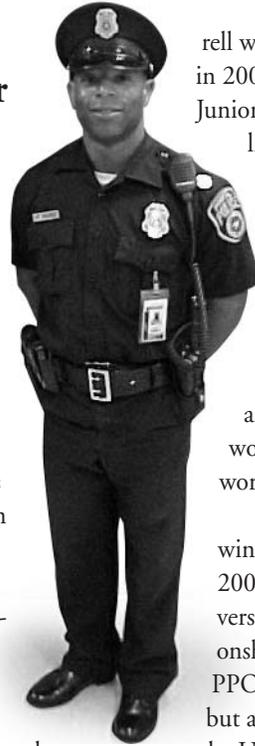
# 'Total Package'

## National Bodybuilder and Postal Police Officer Allan Terrell Is at the Top of His Class

Fitness buffs may recognize Postal Police Officer Allan Terrell of the Postal Inspection Service's St. Louis Division when they see him—if not by his face, then by his imposing physique. Competing for just five years as a professional bodybuilder, PPO Terrell has been featured on Fox Television's "USA Muscle" show and has appeared in *Flex* and *Iron Man* magazines. Certified as a personal trainer by the American Council on Exercise, Allan has won armfuls of trophies.

Other Postal Police Officers call Allan "Muscles" or "Little Hercules" because of his five-foot, four-inch frame and lean 154-pound profile, while other bodybuilders call him "TP," as in "Total Package," alluding to his muscularity, symmetry, and strong presentation at bodybuilding competitions.

Underlying Terrell's physique is a burning desire to excel as a bodybuilder and reach his ultimate goal: winning a national competition. PPO Terrell's drive has propelled him toward the elite across several weight classes. Winning an impressive string of awards over the last three years, Ter-



rell was second at the USA Championships in 2000 as a bantamweight, fourth in the Junior Nationals in 2000 and 2001 as a lightweight, fourth again at the Team Universe Championships in 2002 as a lightweight, first place at the Indianapolis Open Championships, and sixth at the Nationals in 2002 as a bantamweight.

"Every year I get closer and closer to the top," said PPO Terrell, and he believes that "dedication, hard work, and discipline" have continued to work in his favor.

PPO Terrell reached his dream of winning a national crown in August 2003, taking first place at the Team Universe Bodybuilding and Fitness Championships in New York City. Not only is PPO Terrell now at the top of his field, but as a result of the win is a member of the United States men's team bound for the 2003 International Federation of Bodybuilders' World Championships, scheduled to be held in India. The event could be postponed, due to political unrest in that country.

Prior to his August success, Terrell's proudest achievement was winning the National Gym Association's (NGA's) Mid-Central States Bodybuilding Title in 1999. "That qualified me for pro status with the NGA," he said. NGA membership is a badge of honor among bodybuilders, as mem-

bers must achieve exceptional physical form without drugs or artificial supplements, placing added importance on a rigid exercise program and a lean, balanced diet.

Terrell's next goal is the National Physique Committee Nationals at Miami in November 2003. Winning there will be a tall order, even for "Total Package Terrell," but the Postal Inspection Service is cheering him on to his goal.



Postal Police Officer Allan Terrell of the St. Louis Division displays his championship form.

### PPO Terrell follows this daily exercise program and menu for the 12 weeks preceding a bodybuilding competition.

- 4:00 a.m. Treadmill, stationary bike, and Stairmaster for 30 minutes. Breakfast of 6 egg whites, 1 egg yolk, 5 oz. lean beef, and 1/2 grapefruit.
- 9:00 a.m. Protein shake with strawberries, 1 tablespoon flax oil, and 12 oz. water.
- 11:30 a.m. Lunch of 8 oz. chicken breast, 2 cups green vegetables, and 1 tablespoon flax oil.
- 1:30 p.m. Snack of 6 oz. canned tuna, 3 egg whites, 1 egg yolk, and a tomato.
- 4:00 p.m. Weightlifting for 2 to 2 1/2 hrs.
- 7:30 p.m. Dinner of 8 oz. fish and 2 cups' green vegetables.
- 9:00 p.m. Optional meal of fish and vegetables.
- 10:00 p.m. Cardio exercise for 30 minutes.